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FRANCIS GREENWOOD PEABODY

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1



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To
J. A. H.



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INEQUALITY AND PROGRESS

I

PREFATORY

EQUALITY is a charmed word. It fascinates reformers. Prophets that watch for signs and portents as they that watch for the morning are almost unanimous in predictions of a widening social equality. When the word can no longer be used indiscriminately, it is still retained as defining an indispensable principle of progress. This and that necessary qualification may be granted; it may be smitten on either cheek with staggering blows, but it is sure to come up sanguine and smiling. It has a charmed life. If it is pushed out of the door it comes back through the window. Almost every social theory gets it in somewhere, as a fundamental condition of human welfare. A century ago there were many who advocated universal equality, by which they meant that all men should be equal in all respects. To-day there are many who advocate equalizing, not in all, but in certain

respects, as the ideal state towards which society should move. They regard inequality as the chief obstacle to welfare and advancement. Against inequality the heaviest guns of reform are pointed. Progress is thought to consist chiefly in a nearer approach to political, economic, social, and intellectual equality. Even when the difficulty of realizing it is recognized, the conviction remains strong that it is desirable, and that effort should constantly be directed towards gaining the little or the much that is attainable, — the more the better, — as though there could be no question in a sane mind that inequality is in itself a source of evil.

There is undoubtedly some truth — possibly a half-truth — in an idea so persistent. But discrimination is needed in the use of a term which is capable of widely different applications, and which means much or little according to the context.

I believe that a service may be rendered by going back of various theories to certain fundamental facts of human nature and human development, and thus learning what may and what may not be taken for granted. Before social and political theories are constructed, primal truths concerning the constitution, inheritance, and differentiation of men should be recognized. It is often said that the historic sense should be cultivated by the leaders and reformers of society; that they should first

understand the development of the nations through the centuries of history. It might also be said that the ethnologic and anthropologic sense should be cultivated. As knowledge of history, going back for a perspective, gives broader views which moderate expectation of sudden changes, so knowledge of the laws of human selection and inheritance, which lie beneath the movements of history, corrects theories through adjustment of facts.

The reader need not, however, be alarmed with apprehension of technical investigation and tiresome research, nor with threats of an excursion into prehistoric times. This small volume is not a scientific, a philosophical, nor an economic essay. The facts to be considered are patent to the observation of all. The method is empirical, not philosophical; illustrative, not theoretical. Science and philosophy are drawn upon so far as they serve the purposes of the discussion. Social changes which have occurred, and social programmes which are proposed, are frequently mentioned. But the book is no more nor less than a series of observations and reflections which, from various points of view, exhibit the variety and the unity of men.

I am not concerned about the applications of my conclusions to social schemes. It may be that those who cling to equality as a watchword will find support in the facts and tendencies pointed

out in the following pages. It may be that some modification of theories of equality is the more natural application. But the bearing of my opinions on particular theories is only illustrative and incidental. Least of all do I undertake to construct a definite and complete programme of the coming society. Ignorance alone has confidence enough to attempt that which is possible only to omniscience. Yet certain lines can be traced down the past and into the present clearly enough to show the general direction they will probably take in the future.

The title of the book is chosen, not as a challenge exactly, but as the most convenient designation to set against certain errors which are mixed up with notions of equality, and to indicate where the emphasis of the discussion lies. If the title were expanded to define the purpose of the book precisely, it would run: inequality, a condition of progress: but that is too long a title for so small a book, and is sufficiently implied in the more general statement. Although the negative term, inequality, does not cover the positive and constructive portions of the book, it is a truthful sign-board planted at the entrance of a path which will pass in due time from the lower levels of criticism to the higher levels of progress.

II

EXISTING AND EXPECTED EQUALITY

THERE is an essential equality of men which already exists. By constitution all are alike or equal in those endowments which make them human beings as distinguished from animals, as will appear more fully in the next section. In civilized countries all citizens have certain rights and privileges which have been acquired in the course of history. It is believed by many, and may be conceded, that the betterment of men hitherto has coincided with those equalizing processes which have occurred. It is also believed, but is not necessarily conceded, that further progress depends on a nearer approach to equality in certain respects.

Existing equality is commonly and conveniently defined as civil and political. That which is yet to be gained is now most frequently defined as equality of opportunity, although some expect more than that, even complete equality. This is a rather broad generalization, yet the line of division is distinct enough to be seen. On one side, the side of civil and political equality, there is the protec-

tion of law and the right to vote for rulers and measures, without any distinction of persons. On the other side, the side of opportunity, are economic, intellectual, and social conditions, and on that side there are marked distinctions of possessions, class, and culture. On the hither side of citizenship, equality exists. On the yonder side of material conditions, education and leisure for enjoyment and improvement, decided inequality exists. There are many who maintain that on that yonder side effort should be made to produce a nearer approach to equality, if not of actual possession and enjoyment, at least of opportunity to enjoy and possess.

Still further, many believe that from the vantage-ground of existing civil and political equality the opening of opportunity is to be widened. The leverage of suffrage is to be employed for prying open closed doors of privilege. In a word, democracy can and should direct its power towards those material, educational, æsthetic, and social values which are now exclusive by monopoly of the few, and should bring them within the reach of all who have the desire and the will to enjoy them. The belief is entertained that, should all doors of opportunity be opened, should those restrictions of poverty, of enforced idleness, of inadequate remuneration, and of ignorance which hold many in



slavery be removed, should all men be liberated so that no opportunities of labor, skill, or knowledge are closed to them, should there be no grant of monopolies to favored individuals, should adventitious advantages of birth and culture be swept away, society would make enormous advance towards essential equality. The throwing open of all doors of opportunity would, it is imagined, so greatly diminish difference of circumstance that eventually differences of culture would be greatly reduced.

Various methods for the overthrow of barriers and the leveling of circumstance are proposed. Collective production and sharing of material goods is a method which has many advocates. Equalizing of work and of wealth would, they believe, remove the chief obstacles which now withhold from the vast majority of men opportunities of enjoyment and culture. Material goods are not regarded as an end in themselves, but only as a means to the real objects of life. Those who expend all their energy in toiling for bare subsistence are shut off from the higher values to which all men are entitled. The first step is a readjustment of the economic system, in order that all may have sufficient maintenance and sufficient leisure for gaining intellectual and æsthetic culture. Advocacy of collectivism employs argument and statistics in